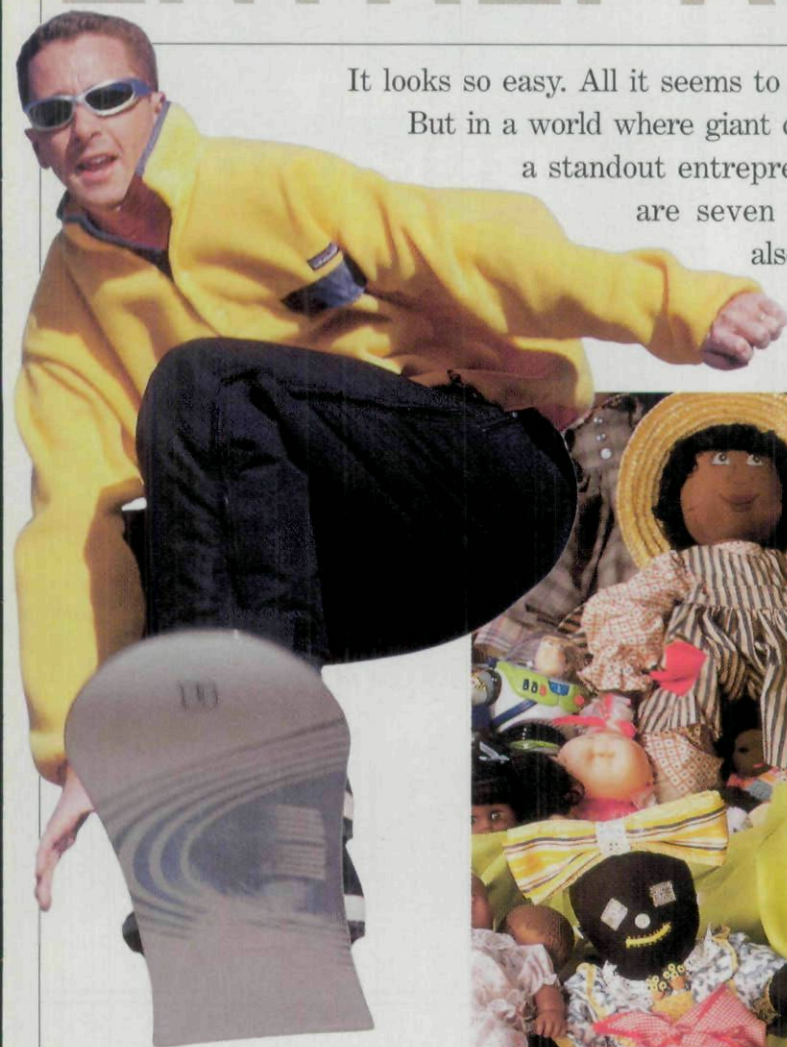


ENTREPRENEURS

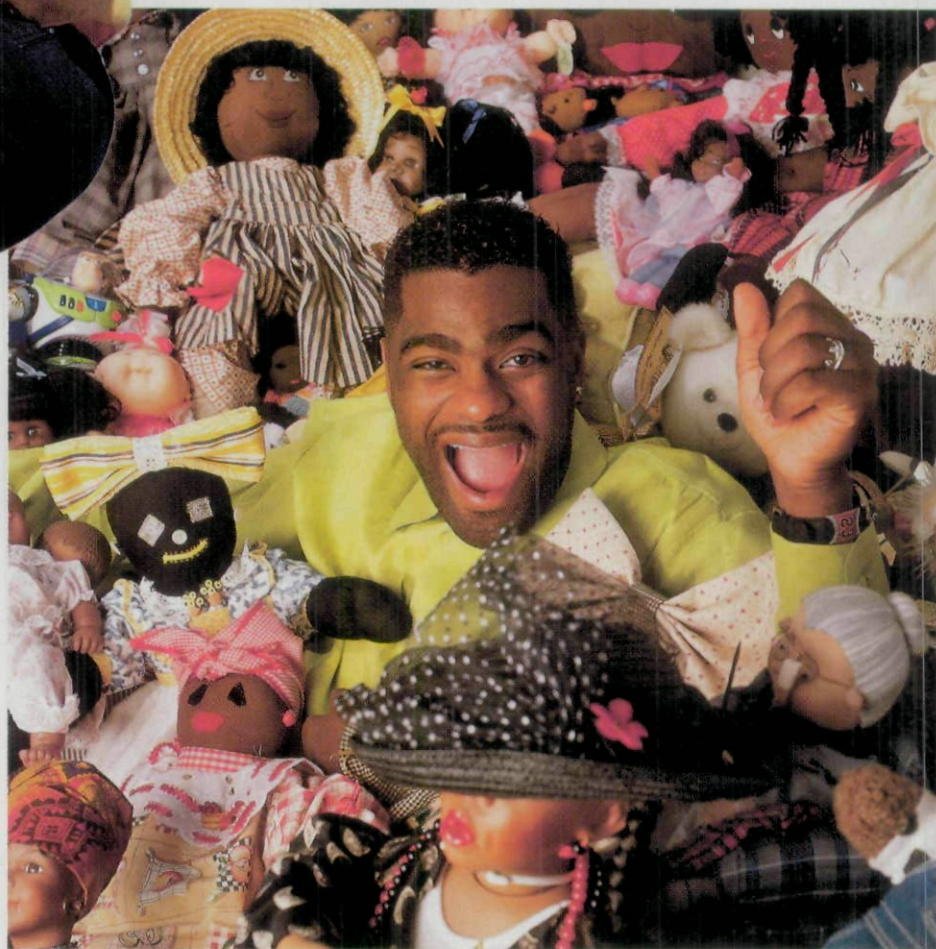
It looks so easy. All it seems to take is a worthy idea and a bit of good luck.

But in a world where giant corporations dominate the landscape, becoming a standout entrepreneur is a whole lot tougher than that. Here are seven who had far more than great ideas. They also pushed ahead with impeccable timing, mind-numbing hard work, and the self-confidence to battle their way into the game.



NET WHIZ

▲ Three years ago, **SKY DAYTON** owned a pair of hip Los Angeles coffeehouses. Then he started EarthLink Network, an Internet service provider. On course toward having 600,000 customers by the end of 1998, EarthLink is fast creeping up on the Microsoft Network. But Dayton, 26, is eyeing the No. 2 slot behind America Online. Revenues, which were just \$3 million in 1995, were nearly \$80 million last year. At 23, the stock was up about 75% for the year.



RICHES FROM RAGS

▲ In just three years, **ANTHONY MARK HANKINS**, 29, has built a \$40 million clothing business, selling his colorful threads to over 1,000 stores including Sears and Nordstrom. He has his own show on the Home Shopping Network, has just launched a line of home furnishings, and this year will expand into fragrances and men's clothing. A relentless marketer, Hankins is set to release his autobiography in March.



MANY HEALTHY RETURNS

◀ Since 1993, when IRWIN D. SIMON, 38, took out a second mortgage to buy a kosher frozen-foods business, his Hain Food Group has acquired a pantry full of healthful and diverse brands. Selling everything from organic tortilla chips to low-fat mayonnaise, Hain has grown from \$15 million in sales in 1994 to \$65 million last year. The company's offerings dominate some of the fastest growing categories in food these days, including organic, sugar-free, and dairy-free products—and shareholders have seen the lite: Hain's shares tripled in 1997, a tasty treat for George Soros, who owns 14%.

COLOR ME SHREWD

► In 1997, DINEH MOHAJER, the 25-year-old founder of Hard Candy, kicked off a fashion craze with mod nail-polish shades like Sky, Mint, Porn, and Jailbait. Mohajer and boyfriend Ben Einstein started out by mixing polish in their West Hollywood bungalow. When Hard Candy's pastel look caught on with celebrities, its popularity soared. Now sold in Bloomingdale's, Nordstrom, and Neiman Marcus, Hard Candy saw sales double to about \$20 million last year, and big-name cosmetics companies are scrambling to cash in with their own imitations.



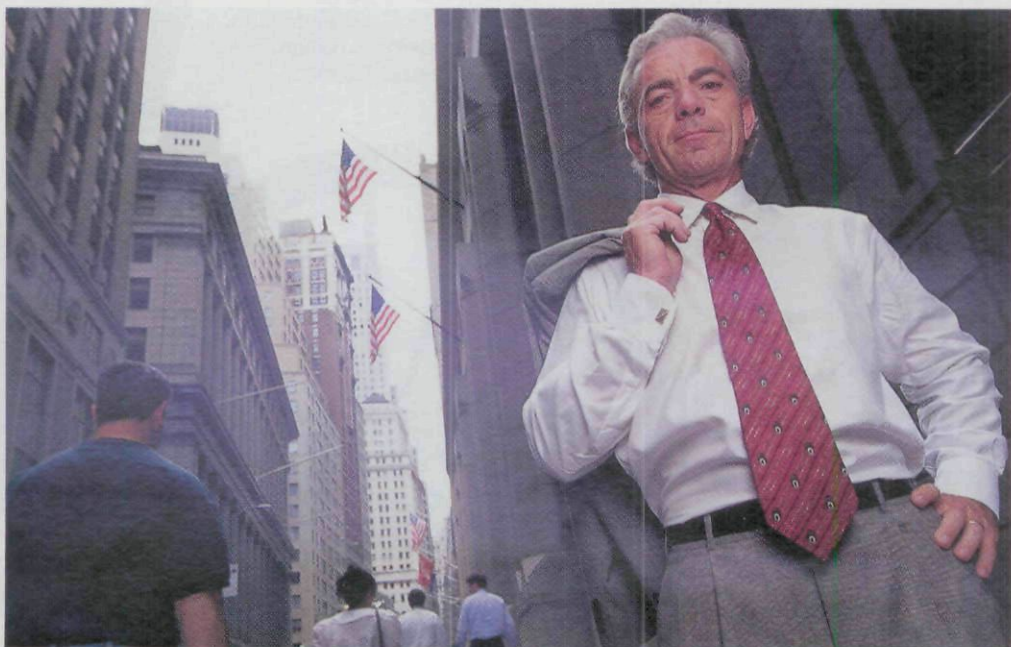
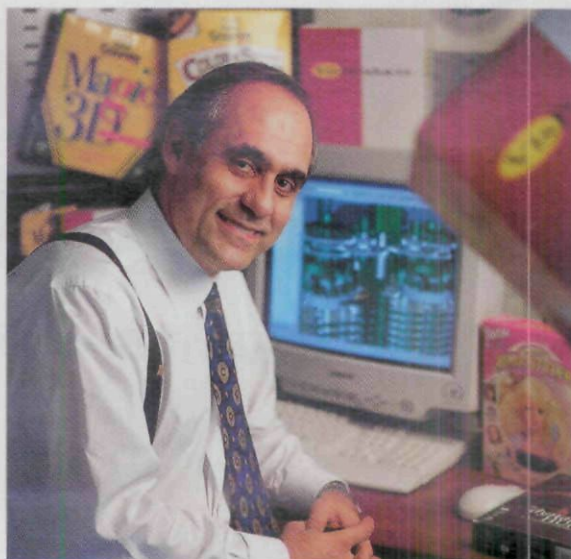


ONLINE EMPEROR

◀ In just five years, CEO **HALSEY M. MINOR** has created an online media empire with CNET. The 33-year-old has 11 Internet sites, including the popular all-tech News.com (page 79), and four television programs devoted to technology. CNET has yet to earn a profit, but 1997 revenues should more than double, to \$37 million. With his September launch of Snap! Online, a competitor to America Online, Minor is going after mainstream consumers.

ANIMATION ARTIST

▶ From the cornfields of Ames, Iowa, comes a hot new name in technology: Engineering Animation. Last year CEO **MATTHEW M. RIZAI**, 41, sold about \$40 million in computer-animation software to the likes of Deere and Ford. More growth will come from new interactive consumer software, such as a CD-ROM for Mattel that lets kids style Barbie's hair. The stock rose about 77% in 1997, to 43, as earnings should soar more than 200%, to around \$5.7 million.



MAKING GOOD ON BAD DEBTS

◀ **WILLIAM R. BARTMANN**, 49, has built an unusual but lucrative financial empire. Since the onetime oil-field supplier started privately held Commercial Financial Services in 1986, it has become the largest buyer of delinquent credit-card accounts written off by banks. Tulsa-based CFS makes money by buying bad debt at 10% of face value, then politely but firmly collecting 30%. Earnings should hit \$190 million for 1997, up 140%.

Copyright of BusinessWeek is the property of Bloomberg, L.P. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.